

St Philip and St James Anglican Church
Palma de Mallorca Spain
25th July 2021
The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
Theme: Humble Service to Christ

Text: Matthew 20: 20-28

Introduction

Greetings in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today is a special day for Spanish spirituality because we are celebrating the feast of St James, the apostle. St James is the patron saint of Spain and his shrine at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela has been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. This is the reason why I opted for the second set of readings so that I may take this opportunity to observe the country's patron saint.

Exegesis of the Text

The gospel reading for today is also paralleled in **Mark 10:35-45** but with some slight variations. In Matthew, the mother of James and John came with the request to Jesus while in Mark the two brothers were the ones who made the request. However, the variations do not significantly affect the contents of the two stories. James and John were two of the three apostles who were closest to Jesus. These two apostles together with Peter were the only ones Jesus

took to the mountain for the transfiguration experience. Therefore, these three disciples would experience the things that the other nine would not have experienced. This story has its roots in the journey that began with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20) and will end with Jesus' entrance in Jerusalem in Chapter 21:1. What was the request that was made by the mother of James and John? "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and the other at your left, in your kingdom." The request was probably stirred up by Matthew 19:28. The request reminds us of the table and other formal situations where the most important person would sit at the centre, the next most important at his right, and the third most important at the left. So, these were best positions in the kingdom and were second only to Jesus Himself. What was Jesus' response to the request? "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink from the cup that I am about to drink?" The response of James and John was; "We are able." I am not sure as to whether the two apostles understood what Jesus meant by the metaphor of a cup. Whereas the disciples imagine that Jesus was referring to the joy of the messianic banquet in the Kingdom of heaven, Jesus was really talking about his suffering and death. The image of the cup of suffering was popularized by the eighth century prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. An understanding of this metaphor would have frightened the two but from their quick response, they seemed to have missed the point. The question by Jesus pointed to the fate in which the disciples themselves will share. The request by the two apostles angered the other nine and Jesus had to take the opportunity to address the subject of Christian

leadership. This was going to be key for the success of the mission of the apostles after His departure. He had to contrast the earthly model of leadership from the Christian model. The terms used to describe the Christian ideal of servant leadership are humble words. He used the Greek words, *diakonos*-one who waits on tables and *doulos*-slave. These terms contrast with the 'power' words used to describe leadership among the gentiles in 20:25.

Application

Is Jesus just spiritualizing the idea of greatness to mean something religious? We live in a world where people strive diligently for high positions of power and leadership, and for fame and recognition. Even the church nowadays seems not to be exempted from power struggles. Who would willingly lead the life of a servant or slave if he/she really wanted greatness? And if there are people who do serve, many of them serve only because of the prospect of personal gain in terms of money, honour, power or recognition. Is Jesus pointing to a leadership model that is practical or real or he is pointing to an idealistic leadership model that is non-existent? Jesus is pointing to the model of leadership he has been living among them. He himself is an embodiment of the servant leadership model, and he is calling the disciples to follow the same path to greatness, humble, sacrificial service to each other. We have read about certain world leaders who embraced this leadership model in their lives. One such leader was Thomas Sankara the former president of Burkina Faso. In 1981, he was appointed minister of Information. He differentiated himself from other government officials in many ways such as cycling to work every day, instead of driving a car. When he became president, he sold off government fleet of Mercedes cars and made Renault 5

(cheapest car) the official service car of the ministers. He reduced his salary to \$450 American Dollars and also that of civil servants. He forbade the use of government chauffeurs and first class air line tickets. He did not want his portrait hung in public places. However, the world does not like such simple, humble and radical leaders; he did not live long as he was shot by some members of his government. What assets did he leave at his death? One car, four bikes, three guitars, a refrigerator and a broken freezer. Those were the assets that were left behind by the head of the state. Twenty years later they recognized the value of his leadership and he was commemorated on the 15th October 2007 in Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Niger, Tanzania, Burundi, France, Canada and USA. In conclusion, why we ought to be servants?

1. Being a servant is the distinguishing mark of greatness in Christ's kingdom.
2. It is the disciple's means to follow Christ's examples.
3. It is the divine mode of edifying Christ's people.

May the almighty God bless us all. Amen.

The Rev'd Canon Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha
Chaplain